



Loyola Institute Theologian elected Vice-President of European Society of Catholic Theology

It was an astonishing surprise to find myself elected as Vice-President of the European Society of Catholic Theology at the Annual General Meeting held during our recent conference in Pécs, Hungary last August. The aim of the European Society for Catholic Theology is to promote the academic discipline of Catholic theology primarily at the intersection where Church and society meet, ‘engaging with the many questions which challenge Christian faith as well as contemporary European culture.’

It really is a privilege and honour to be in this role at a time of great crisis not only for the Church in Europe but also for the discipline of theology in European universities. To keep our Eastern and Western members in conversation is important. We share such different recent histories in terms of church and politics. The diplomatic challenges of my new role have become very apparent to me. At a meeting just prior to the outbreak of war in Ukraine, our Ukraine section president joined us by Zoom and while some of us remain in contact with Roman he has not, for obvious reasons, attended recent meetings. And indeed, not all of our member countries view the war in the same light.

I will become President in two years’ time, and in the meantime as Vice President, I am tasked with organising a conference for 2025 (August 21-23) in Ireland. This will



Dr Fáinche Ryan

be an important opportunity to showcase theology in Ireland, as well as the Church in Ireland. I do hope we will have rich Irish ecclesial participation. While I have not yet confirmed the theme, Pope Francis’ recent apostolic letter *Ad Theologiam Promovendam* (“To Promote Theology”, Nov 1, 2023), will be at the root of my thinking.

The promotion of theological reflection on faith is a big challenge. Theological reflection on faith for the baptised in a widespread way does not always seem to be a high ecclesial priority. Catechism can often be preferred, but the time has arrived when it is essential that we, the Church, actively engage people’s minds as well as their hearts. As 1 Peter 3 advises, we are to



sanctify, to revere Christ as Lord in our hearts, at the same time we are to ‘be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you’. To share this Christian hope one needs to be well grounded in what one believes. So, to use our organisation to promote the study of theology, and not only in the academy, is something I would like to advance during my time in leadership of the ESCT.

In this task continuous work to improve cooperation with bishops is a matter of much importance. Sometimes theology has been experienced and deemed as ‘too academic’. This travesty needs addressing. Theology is alive and so relevant to our everyday lives; it is a discipline at once challenging and engaging ... as is life. Theology should be informing preaching – the subject of theology is God, and so also should the subject of our preaching be God, and the Word of God, ‘living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow’. That is what theology is about.

Four years in these roles seems a long time but it will surely pass rapidly. In the meantime I will see what can be done.

Dr Fáinche Ryan

Witness with Siobhán Garrigan



Having presented RTÉ’s Friday night show ‘A Leap of Faith’ over the last two years, the Loyola Professor of Catholic Theology takes the helm for a new series ‘Witness. with Siobhán Garrigan’ mapping the religious spiritual and moral landscape of Ireland and beyond. You can listen to the programme on Fridays at 10:00 PM on RTÉ Radio One.

Papal Heresy – Presentation of Paper in Pécs

Towards the end of August, 2023, I was honoured to be able to present a paper at the 2023 Congress of the European Society for Catholic Theology, which was held at the Episcopal Theological College of Pécs, Hungary. This paper was based on an [article](#) I have recently published in the December 2023 edition of the peer-reviewed journal *Theological Studies*. The article focuses on the possibility of a pope teaching heresy through the ordinary, non-infallible exercise of the papal Magisterium, which has been used as a means of dissent towards recent magisterial documents, such as the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* (2016) and the Apostolic Letter *Desiderio desideravi* (2022). Given the fact that the question of a heretical pope was used as the primary objection to the solemn definition of the dogma of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council, I look at the various literature dealing with this topic which was discussed during the course of the council itself. In my article for *Theological Studies*, which is based on the first chapter of my doctoral thesis, I focus on the writings of St. Robert Bellarmine and the official *relatio* delivered by Bishop Vincent Gasser, which explained the meaning of the



Emmet O'Regan PhD student with Dr Fáinche Ryan and Sr Michael Kirwan on Loyola Institute at conference in Pécs, Hungary

dogmatic constitution of the Church *Pastor aeternus* before the voting commenced to ratify its contents. Here, I attempt to demonstrate how the idea of a heretical pope was definitively rejected in *Pastor aeternus*, as was stipulated in Bishop Gasser’s *relatio*.

Emmet O'Regan
PhD student

‘The Synod: An early assessment of the 2023 assembly in Rome’

The principal event of the term was a public lecture by Dr Massimo Faggioli (Villanova University), on 2nd November. This took place shortly after the conclusion of the first session of the synod in Rome. The lecture therefore was a chance for this noted theologian and commentator to give us his first personal reactions on the synod and on its possible fruits. Dr. Faggioli spoke of what had happened, and what still needs to happen between now and the second session in eleven months' time. He spoke enthusiastically of what he regarded as the greatest demonstration of the Church's vitality since Vatican II. We should see it as a process, rather than an event; a process which has left space for corrections and improvements. The first part of the talk located the synod historically. It is, as it were, the third step in Catholicism's journey to come to terms with modernity, after Vatican I and Vatican II. In contrast to the first two steps, however, this did not unfold by means of debates and disputations, followed by voting toward a majoritarian decision. The process was grounded, not in argument, but in spiritual conversation working toward consensus.

It would be a mistake to think of it as 'revolution'. Rather (to cite theologian Christophe Theobald) it is better understood as a 'pacification', or reconciliation between different Catholic cultures, in a context where we are all participants, and not passive consumers. A consultation on 'different ways of being Catholic', therefore, in a world much more diverse than previously (likewise, with many ways of ceasing to be Catholic!). A 'meta-synod', that is, a synod on synodality is like trying to build an airplane while it is in flight. As noted, the gathering was more of a retreat than a voting assembly.

While the synod proceeded without major incidents or controversies (unlike recent synods), the role of participant theologians was muted. There is a concern as to a lack of theological depth: a period of sharing and taking pulse, but with little in-depth analysis of the implications of synod. There is an interesting analogy with the opening session of Vatican II, where the inadequacy of the preparatory documents (1960-62) required a re-set from 1963 onwards. So there is all to play for: and



Dr Massimo Faggioli speaking at Loyola Institute event

here, the continuity and sense of community among the same group of people in the two synodal sessions will be significant.



Standing room only to listen to Dr Faggioli

The good news, according to Dr. Faggioli, is that we are still a Vatican II Church- our 'operating system' is the Council, with some updates. But in some respects we are still at Vatican III! What we can say is that in his updating of an ancient governance structure (the synod), Francis is recognising that a certain kind of episcopalism is inadequate. Something more than empowerment of the bishops is needed.

The synod is an interesting, complicated experiment. The Catholic Church looks to find its own way, in contrast to two other synodal styles: eastern Orthodoxy (which is confined to bishops), and the Reformed churches (which is more parliamentarian). Both these styles have problems. The process requires corrections; but Dr. Faggioli struck a note of grounded hope. Patience, as ever, is needed- but something has already happened!

Dr Michael Kirwan

Events at Loyola Institute



Prof. James Keenan SJ with Prof. M. Cathleen Kaveny and Dr Michael Kirwan

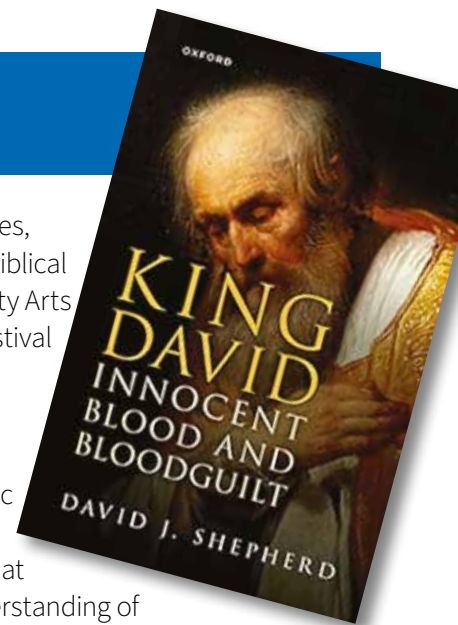
The Loyola Institute hosted, or co-hosted, a number of events during the Michaelmas term, 2023.

In September, a discussion and book launch took place in the Long Room Hub (Trinity's Arts research venue). David Shepherd's book, *King David, Innocent Blood, and Bloodguilt* explores the enigma of bloodshed which runs through King David's career, from Goliath to the murder of Uriah, and beyond: panellists responded from the perspectives of biblical studies, ethics, classics, theology, and medieval history. Michael Kirwan drew parallels with anxieties about legitimacy in contemporary political theology and in literature, citing the blood motif in *Macbeth*. The event was organised in conjunction with the School of Religion,

Theology, and Peace Studies, and the Trinity Centre for Biblical Studies, as part of the Trinity Arts & Humanities Research Festival 2023.

In October, Loyola co-hosted the Pax Christi conference, on the 'Catholic Nonviolence Initiative', a conversation which aimed at deepening a Catholic understanding of and commitment to Gospel nonviolence, in line with the exploration of Pax Christi International and the Vatican. The speakers were Pat Gaffney (CNI), and Marie Dennis (via Zoom), followed by a panel discussion with representatives of local and national peace organisations. The event had a particular urgency and poignancy, coming days after the Hamas attacks in Israel.

In December, the moral theologian and ethicist James Keenan delivered a public lecture, "Pathways to Holiness: Ethics in Early Christianity". A response was given by Prof. Keenan's colleague at Boston College, Prof. M. Cathleen Kaveny (professor in Theology and in Law). Drawing on his recent book, *A History of Catholic Theological Ethics* (2022), Prof. Keenan argued that early Christian approaches to morality were centred on the desire for progress in holiness, discipleship, and union with God, rather than on more modern anxieties about sin and how to avoid it.



A Date For Your Diary

Thursday 11 April 7.30pm

*The Book of Kells:
Imagining Kells*

In this lively illustrated talk in the Loyola Insitute, the poet James Harpur explores the creative possibilities of the Book of Kells, illuminating some of its rich details and themes and unfolding how he came to write a poem about it.



Poet James Harpur



Dr Michael Kirwan, Director of Loyola Institute attended a conference in Rome in June 2023, on 'Global Aesthetics of the Catholic Imagination'. The event included an audience with Pope Francis.

Scholarship winners and donors honoured at a reception in Loyola Institute, Trinity College Dublin, on Thursday 2nd November

The Loyola Institute at Trinity College Dublin is dedicated to education and research in theology in the Catholic Christian tradition and offers degrees at postgraduate level, both taught and by research.

For many of our students scholarships are important, and the Loyola Institute is very grateful to the Missionary of Our Lady of Apostles, The Sisters of St John of God, the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, the Passionist provinces of Britain and Ireland and the Loyola Trust for generously sponsoring scholarships.



(L-R) Colette Varley (Loyola Trust scholarship); Fr Tom Layden SJ (Chair, Loyola Trust); Angela Finegan (Loyola Trust scholarship); Dr Michael Kirwan SJ (Director, Loyola Institute).



(L-R) Dr Fáinche Ryan (Loyola Institute); Sr Solange Uzoigwe (Sisters Angèle-Marie Littlejohn and Bibliane Leclerq Scholarship, awarded by Missionary of Our Lady of Apostles); Sr Kathleen McGarvey (Provincial, OLA)



(L-R) Catherine Swift (Bridget Clancy Scholarship, awarded by the Sisters of St John of God); Dr Fáinche Ryan; Sr. Geraldine Fitzpatrick (Congregational Leader, SSJG)



(L-R) Piero Andrés Fagandini Elorrieta (Spiritans Mission Scholarship); Dr. Fáinche Ryan (Loyola Institute); Fr. Michael Kelly CSSp (Provincial Spiritans), Dr Michael Kirwan SJ



(L-R) Fr. Adrian Egan, C.Ss.R.; Onyewuchi Uzoma Obirueze (Sean O'Riordan scholarship); Dr Cornelius Casey C.Ss.R (Inaugural Director, Loyola Institute)

MPhil in Christian Theology Webinar and Q&A

Tuesday 20 February, 6pm

This informal webinar will be an opportunity to hear more about studying the MPhil in Christian Theology at Loyola Institute Trinity College Dublin, hear about scholarships and meet teaching staff Dr Fáinche Ryan and Dr Michael Kirwan. There will also be the opportunity to submit any questions you have.

All are welcome to join. Register here.



(L-R) Dr. Fáinche Ryan (Loyola Institute); Andrew Connolly (Blessed Dominic Barberi Studentship, awarded by Passionist Provinces of Britain and Ireland); Fr James Sweeney CP (Provincial, CP)

MPhil in Theology – A Career Enhancing Choice

Before enrolling at the Loyola Institute, I trained as a post-primary Religious Education and English teacher. I worked in a few schools and for eight years, I very much enjoyed the work of teaching. However, in 2019 I began to grow a bit restless and I signed up for the MPhil in Christian Theology because I felt the course might stimulate my own thinking, expand my horizons and invigorate my teaching. I also had half a mind to explore going on to a career in academia.

What I did not expect was that by studying the early Irish Church, my interest in medieval manuscripts would be the most profoundly impactful part of the course in terms of my future career. I was inspired by my studies in this area to sign up for a year-long Studentship at the National Library of Ireland and to pursue a career in librarianship and special collections. After this, I worked for a short time at the libraries of UCD and Maynooth University, getting further library experience. I then worked at the Chester Beatty for a year as an Education Officer, where I was able to combine my expertise in teaching, theology and manuscripts.

Most recently, I was appointed as Assistant Librarian at the Library of the Royal Irish Academy, with particular responsibility for cataloguing and outreach. The Academy Library holds the largest collection of Gaelic manuscripts in the world, and my time at the Loyola Institute, with its focus on the legacy of the Irish church and its commitment to teaching and learning, was a crucial preparation for the work of caring for this wonderful collection and helping to share it with the public.

Emma Rothwell



During her time as Education Officer at the Chester Beatty Library Emma Rothwell brought some of students from the undergraduate module in Medieval Theology on a Library visit

One of the problems being a Church Minister is that a theological weariness can set in. 'Been to all the churches and worn the doctrinal tee-shirt' becomes our mantra and there is surely little new that the TCD MPhil in Christian Theology (or its incremental younger siblings of Certificate and Diploma) can deliver. As yours truly was to discover, denial, as they say in certain parts of Dublin, is not just a river in Egypt.

On the MPhil programme in Christian Theology, students of whatever background, will discover a wonderful roller-coaster of theological treasures that surprise and fascinate in equal measure. From Christology to the first words of the Bible, from themes of violence and grace to ministry, and from the co-mingling of the Arts and divinity and back to the student's chosen dissertation, this course plays with the theological senses like few others.

Yet its applicability to the world we all inhabit is perhaps its greatest secret. Since finishing, I have embarked on the Clinical Pastoral Education programme in the Mater Hospital in Dublin and can safely say that without the benefit of the MPhil, my work would have far less meaning for myself – or for the patient. To be able to pastorally shepherd the sick through their most difficult times and identify the transcendent spaces where Christ awaits, has, for me, been guided by all those wonderful God-fuelled evenings in Trinity on the MPhil programme. One very ill patient asked me recently, 'where was God when he needed Him?' 'In full view and everywhere' was my opening response. Thank you sincerely, Loyola, for helping me turn the extraordinary into the ordinary for those at a time in their lives who may require it the most.

John Deane-O'Keeffe



John Deane-O'Keeffe is a Criminologist & Lecturer in Forensic Psychology. He is also a Licenced Lay Minister in the Church of Ireland.

Current students Experiences of PostGraduate Studies in Christian Theology



I enrolled in the MPhil in Christian Theology because I've always been fascinated by questions about God, religion, and the afterlife, and I wanted to know how thinkers within the Christian tradition have approached these perennial topics. I had previously studied some philosophy of religion, but philosophy approaches these topics in a very general and independent way: you will discuss God, but you might not discuss the Incarnation, or the Trinity, or the concept of faith. To learn how Christian thinkers have understood and conceptualised these matters, I felt the MPhil in Christian Theology was the best option.

For me, the most enjoyable aspect of the MPhil so far has been the diversity of topics covered in the course. I have been able to engage with theology from a philosophical, historical, and even a literary perspective, and the assigned readings have covered everything from medieval scholasticism to contemporary feminist thinkers. This has consolidated some of the knowledge I already had, but it has also exposed me to topics I wouldn't otherwise have encountered.

Particularly for some of the classic theological texts, I think my philosophical background has helped a lot. Still, other students in the class

have backgrounds in history or religious studies, and the variety of subjects covered in the MPhil has allowed us to engage with each other's interests and to learn new ways of thinking about the Christian faith. The lecturers have been really helpful and the modules well-structured, so that students without an academic background have been able to partake in this process as well. Overall, I'm really looking forward to the second term!

Luke Duggan

My name is Solange Uzoigwe HHCJ from Nigeria. I am a sister of the Congregation of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus, and an MPhil Christian theology student at the Loyola Institute, Trinity College Dublin.

This is my first time in Ireland! Many thanks to the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles for making this possible through their scholarship scheme and all thanks to my Congregation for permitting me to come. I was elated to learn of my selection for this honour and I am immensely grateful for this generous and thoughtful gift. Equally, I am deeply appreciative of my Sisters in the community where I live, the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary, Temple Road Dublin, who have generously gifted me accommodation, for their supportive love and tenderness.

It has always been my utmost desire to grow in my knowledge of God and this MPhil programme has made my dreams come true. The environment and time are conducive for learning.

Writing the essays for each module is an engaging and enjoyable task, and at once challenging. I have learnt to analyze and be critical in my thinking when approaching theological questions; and lecturers are always willing to help students improve their work. The seminars/workshops organised by the institute are very productive and many things about God are becoming clearer.

It was a surprise to me to discover that the class group is so diverse. We are from different nationalities, ages, beliefs, genders and yet the depth of cooperation and unity among

classmates is amazing. Equally, I did not expect to be learning the theology behind the Irish high crosses and the Book of Kells. I have found this really inspiring.

The lecturers are well informed and passionate about their subjects. The course has deepened my understanding of God. My hope is that I will be more effective in my witnessing on whichever mission I undertake in the future. I recommend this programme to anyone who wishes to deepen his/her Christian faith and promote Christian values which are currently compromised in our world today; the person will not regret it.

Solange Uzoigwe



Sr Solange Uzoigwe, Dr Fáinche Ryan and MPhil student Colette Varley enjoy the sunshine outside Loyola Institute.

Reflection on Leuven Conference

Imagine going to a picturesque city in Europe to listen to some of the world's most respected scholars discuss your favorite topic and having an opportunity to contribute to the debate? Would you feel excited, honored and somewhat nervous?

Well, that is exactly how I felt going to the 14th Leuven Encounters in Systematic Theology (LEST) conference in November.

The conference theme focused on the Second Vatican Council, an event Pope Francis has described as a visit of God to the Church. The title of the conference also posed a question: "60 Years Vatican II: The End of the 'Western' Church?"

The programme offered a feast of fresh thinking about the most important religious event of the 20th century and its impact on the Church today. Many of the finest minds and most erudite thinkers in the Catholic world featured in the line-up of speakers. When to my surprise, I bumped into some of them queuing for a coffee or ambling along the city's cobble-stone streets, I was a little starstruck. Having read their books, travelled inwardly with them on journeys of the mind and soul, it was thrilling to meet them in the flesh.

The conference gave me my first opportunity to present a paper to an academic audience and share my ideas with like-minded people. It was reassuring to have the supportive presence of my PhD supervisor Dr Fáinche Ryan and fellow doctoral student Emmett O'Regan, who also presented a paper.



Ursula Halligan, PhD student, Prof Fáinche Ryan, Prof Peter de Mey, KU Leuven, Emmett O'Regan, PhD student.

A highlight of the conference was the Eucharistic service held on the final day in St John the Baptist's Church, in the Great Beguinage area of Leuven. Catherine Clifford, the Canadian theologian and a full voting member of the synod on synodality, read the Gospel, delivered the homily and distributed the Eucharist. It was an uplifting if all too rare display of female representation on the altar.

Ursula Halligan
PhD student



Some of post-graduate class of 23/24 with Dr Michael Kirwan and Dr Fáinche Ryan.

The Loyola Institute is grateful for the generous support of the Loyola Trust (Augustinians, Carmelites (O.Carm.), Columbans, Jesuits, Loreto Sisters, Marists, Oblates and the Society of African Missions).



The Loyola Institute

School of Religion

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

is dedicated to education and research in theology in the Catholic Christian tradition and offers degrees at postgraduate level, both taught and by research.

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